YUMMY FUR'S CHESTER BROWN

#93

FROM BARBARIAN TO THE NEW BOY WONDER —
CHARLES DIXON

IS TIM DRAKE A DEAD DUCK?
TOM LYLE TALKS ABOUT ROBIN'S RETURN

RÉMY BASTIEN
MADE IN MEXICO: COMICS CRISIS IN A CATHOLIC COUNTRY

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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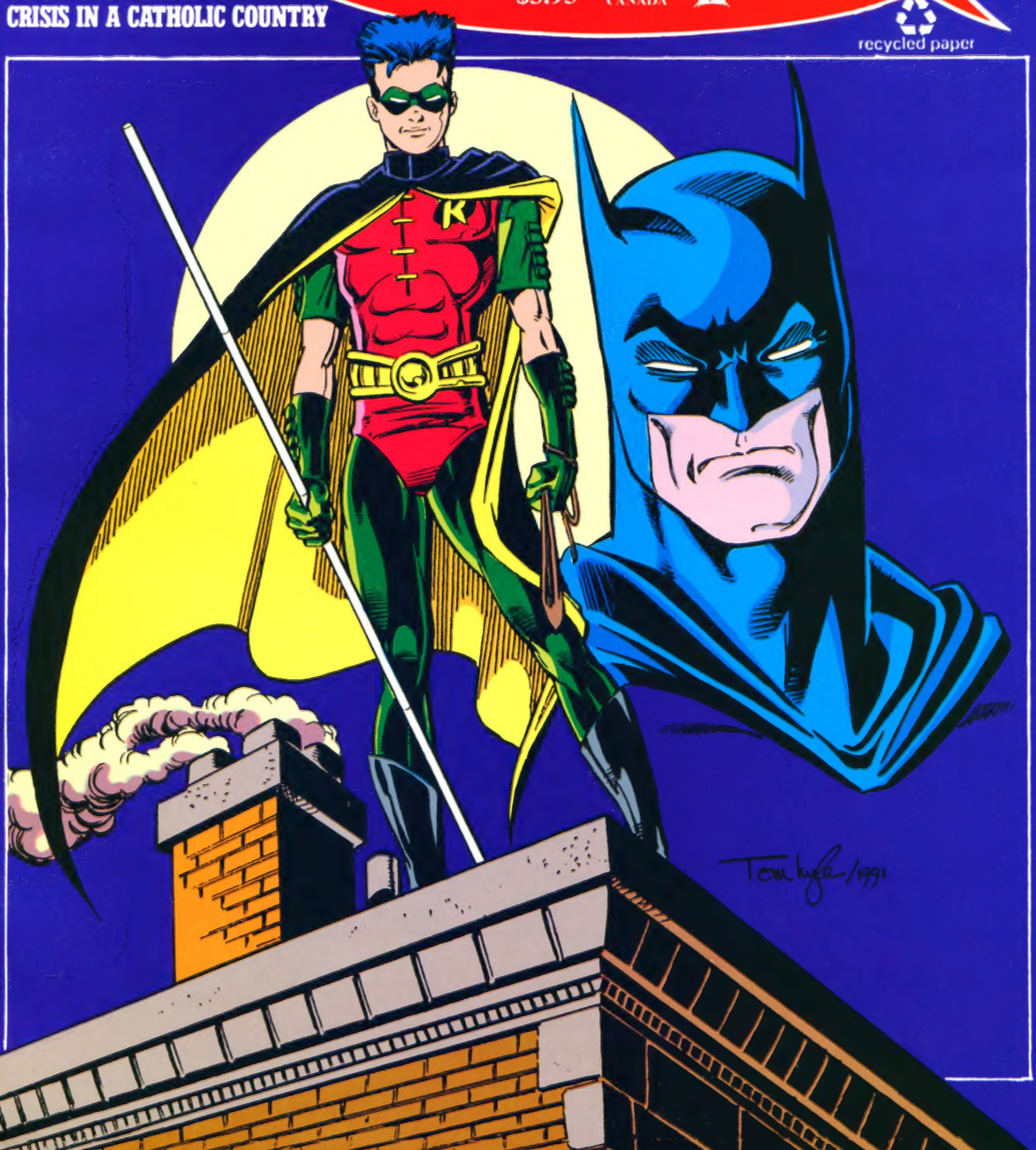

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UP FRONT

A LETTER

Dear J. Torres —

Enjoyed the **Chester Brown** interview. He's got some good points about transcending the slambang comics stuff that interests us as kids — although I'm not sure scatological whimsy is the way to accomplish that, and I'm uneasy about forsaking the concept of superheroes (the competent man) in favor of the dismal despairing existential helplessness of the European model (man as victim). Is it really "adult" to concede defeat and chaos in the face of life — or might there be a *more* adult way to treat the concept of man as the master of his fate?

There are the seeds of an interesting debate here — maybe, someday, we'll see an interview that addresses these issues (I think **Frank Miller** would be a good choice, along with **Chester Brown** and maybe one or two others).

Anyway, I can see Chester's side of the argument; question is, can *he* see the value in the opposing mainstream view?

Cordially,

-David

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"I've done mini-series and graphic novels here and there."

"My first big break was through Larry Hama at Marvel."

CHUCK DIXON

We last talked to Chuck Dixon back in COMICS INTERVIEW #57 when he was just beginning to make a name for himself in comics as a scripter.

Now he's no longer an unknown quantity — the smash ROBIN miniseries has landed him front and center in mainstream superhero comics. Let's share the insights experience and success have brought him . . .

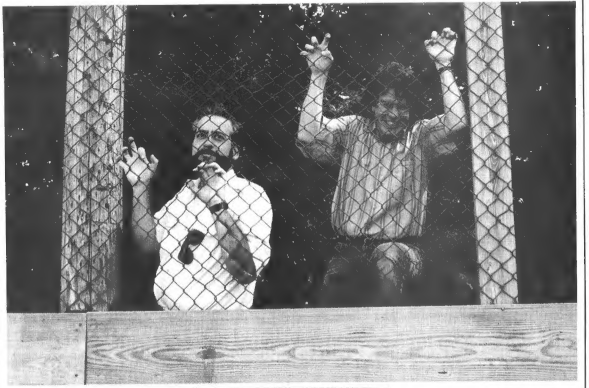
RENE WITTERSTAETTER: *What did you first write?*

CHUCK DIXON: I broke in with Comico doing EVANGELINE during the explosion of the independent companies.

RENE: *What kind of company was Comico to work for?*

CHUCK: At the beginning there was a lot of enthusiasm. As it became more and more of a business I found out that they were better off with enthusiasm. *(Laughter.)* I think the business outgrew them. I left very early, before a lot of their big successes like ELEMENTALS. Then my first *big* break was through **Larry Hama** at Marvel. He let me write some SAVAGE TALES stories, I wrote the Kull back-up in SAVAGE SWORD, and then eventually he gave me the lead feature and, as you know, I did the lead feature for four years under various

Chuck Dixon and Tom Lyle totally enmeshed in their work.



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"Once I proved reliability, editors noticed. I've worked

editors. And once I proved my reliability there, and at Eclipse with AIRBOY, other editors started noticing me. That was it.

RENE: *Have you worked at most of the major companies?*

CHUCK: I've worked for almost everybody but Dark Horse and Disney, so far.

RENE: *What are the differences between the demands that each company places on the writer?*

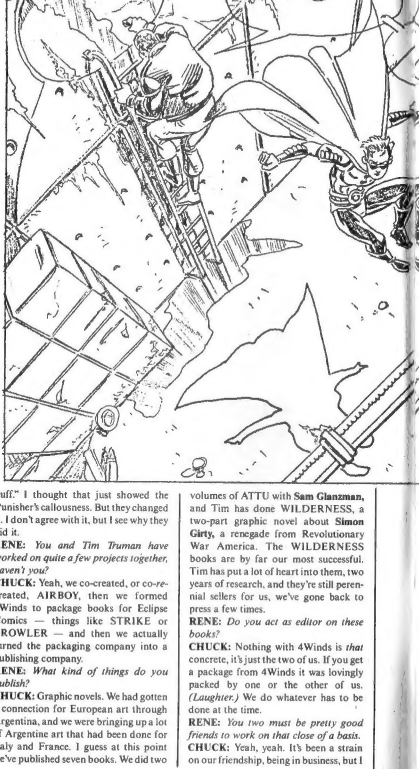
CHUCK: It's a difference between editors — there's no company policy, I've found. Every editor is different. Whether it's a tiny little company with three titles or monoliths like Marvel or DC, there's really no difference, it's still a really personal business. It's your relationship with your editor and your penciller, that's what it gets down to.

RENE: *It's kind of precarious, then, because if a book changes editors you might find yourself not on that book anymore?*

CHUCK: Either that or in a whole new set of circumstances. A lot of things go on the readers aren't aware of. Editorial changes . . . some books you feel that it came out the way you wanted it to, some books you don't, because it gets into the production machine. But that's just something to deal with, it keeps it interesting. I think I've had a good relationship with everyone I've ever worked with, even if we didn't agree — and sometimes some of the best books come out of not agreeing. *(Laughter.)* It creates a tension between all of the creative people; it's not a *bad* tension, it's a *good* tension, to make you do your best. "He thinks I can't write, I'm gonna *show* him!" But that's what it gets down to, it's not a company thing. I don't notice a difference.

RENE: *Can you think of any situations where something was changed that you really did* not *agree with?*

CHUCK: Uh . . . I wouldn't agree with *some* of the changes but I can see why they made them. There was a story with the Punisher and Moon Knight in which the Punisher drops a guy into a car compactor. Moon Knight is interrogating him and Punisher decides he's not doing a good enough job so the Punisher begins interrogating him, and the guy tells what he knows, the information they need, and then the Punisher turns the car compactor on and squashes him. He was in a convertible, so he becomes mangled with this Caddy, and *my* line was that Moon Knight would say, "Do you know what you've done?" and the Punisher says, "Yeah, that Caddy was a cream



puff." I thought that just showed the Punisher's callousness. But they changed it. I don't agree with it, but I see why they did it.

RENE: *You and Tim Truman have worked on quite a few projects together, haven't you?*

CHUCK: Yeah, we co-created, or co-re-created, AIRBOY, then we formed 4Winds to package books for Eclipse Comics — things like STRIKE or PROWLER — and then we actually turned the packaging company into a publishing company.

RENE: *What kind of things do you publish?*

CHUCK: Graphic novels. We had gotten a connection for European art through Argentina, and we were bringing up a lot of Argentine art that had been done for Italy and France. I guess at this point we've published seven books. We did two volumes of ATTU with **Sam Glanzman,** and Tim has done WILDERNESS, a two-part graphic novel about **Simon Girty,** a renegade from Revolutionary War America. The WILDERNESS books are by far our most successful. Tim has put a lot of heart into them, two years of research, and they're still perennial sellers for us, we've gone back to press a few times.

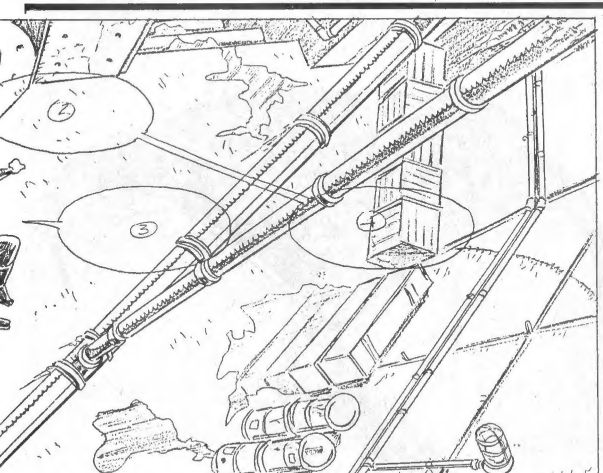
RENE: *Do you act as editor on these books?*

CHUCK: Nothing with 4Winds is *that* concrete, it's just the two of us. If you get a package from 4Winds it was lovingly packed by one or the other of us. *(Laughter.)* We do whatever has to be done at the time.

RENE: *You two must be pretty good friends to work on that close of a basis.*

CHUCK: Yeah, yeah. It's been a strain on our friendship, being in business, but I

for almost everybody but Dark Horse and Disney."



think we can bear up under it.

RENE: *How long have you known Tim?*

CHUCK: Oh, geez, Tim wrote a letter to EVANGELINE when I first started doing it, so . . . man, I can't believe this, it's got to be six or seven years.

RENE: *Was he in comics at that time?*

CHUCK: Yes, he had just done GRIMJACK — GRIMJACK #1 had come out — and Grimjack was in the same pose that Evangeline was in her first issue — they came out exactly the same month.

RENE: *Wow.*

CHUCK: So there was obviously a connection there. *(Laughter.)*

RENE: *Some kind of psychic connection.*

CHUCK: Yeah. He wrote a letter, I wrote a letter back, and then we met at a Chicago convention and realized that we were sympatico on a lot of things.

RENE: *Are there some things that you want to publish that you haven't been able to do yet?*

CHUCK: Not really, we're kind of slowing down on that end.

RENE: *Because of the economy?*

CHUCK: The economy, and graphic novels . . . . I don't think anybody sells that many graphic novels, and if you're a small company it's even worse. You don't want to move into the monthlies because it's too much of a hassle — both of us have very busy freelance careers. I think we're going to concentrate more on Tim's end of the thing with WILDERNESS since we got a big response from *outside* the comics industry. We sold quite a few copies through WILD WEST MAGAZINE, MUZZLE LOADER; they sell at mountain man rendezvous rather than at comics conventions. And we've gotten quite a bit of press on it. That's more where the company will lean, sort of slow down the schedule and concentrate on that, and just bring out projects as they're completed, not try to keep a printing schedule up. Both of us are busy.

RENE: *That must have been quite an adjustment, going from the creative side of comics into the actual publishing side.*

CHUCK: It's been an education. It's helped me a lot in my freelance career, especially knowing the distribution end, *why* distributors buy comics, why retailers *order* so many of this. It's helped me out an awful lot.

RENE: *Made you realize what's saleable?*

CHUCK: Yeah, what's saleable, what's commercial, what are they looking for; the realities of the business. What you've got to do to call attention to something that may not be commercial. Because I've done everything but be an actual editor, it's allowed me to see everything from either side. It's helped.

CHUCK DIXON

"The biggest thing I've worked on so far was ROBIN."

RENE: *We've mentioned a few of your freelance credits. Could you tell me what else you've written, and what you're currently writing?*

CHUCK: I did the first two years of MOON KNIGHT, the new MOON KNIGHT. I've done ALIEN LEGION for Epic, I've been doing that for three or four years. I've done quite a few things for Eclipse, WINTERWORLD, STRIKE. For Now Comics I did ALIAS and RACER X. I've done a lot of mini-series and graphic novels here and there; I've done a KA-ZAR graphic novel, a PUNISHER graphic novel, and I've got a WARMAN graphic novel coming out from Epic, a new character. I'm the regular writer on THE 'NAM now. I've done a few fill-ins with PUNISHER. I'm doing CAR WARRIORS for Epic, based on the CAR WARS role-playing game. And I guess the biggest thing I've worked on so far is ROBIN.

RENE: *What kind of experience was that? How was it different from other things that you've written?*

CHUCK: Well, it was what they called at DC "editorially driven," which *could* have made it a nightmare. So many people at the company wanted to say what the series would be about, where it would begin and where it would end, what they expected from it.

RENE: *They wanted to know everything?*

CHUCK: They wanted to know everything and they had a lot of ideas to give me. Basically, we knew where it was going to begin, they *told* me where it would begin, and they told me where it had to end.

RENE: *Could you do anything in between?*

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"Batman and Robin, there's a reason why they've been

CHUCK: Oh, sure. *(Laughter.)* But at the beginning I didn't think so, I thought I'd really walked into a meat grinder and they were going to just tear everything I wrote apart. But they were very good about it, very encouraging. **Denny O'Neil** put everything in place for me.

RENE: *Had you worked with Denny before?*

CHUCK: No, never. But in a very short time — he knows so *much* about Batman, he's got such a *handle* on the character like I don't think anybody else does — he was able to give me the rundown on the Batman and Robin relationship, and the relationship with Alfred, and what all that meant. So the first issue was pretty scary, but everything went great, I had a good time on it. They let me do what I wanted to most of the time, I was very surprised. Because it's not only Denny looking at it, it's everybody else.

RENE: *Because of the success of the DEATH IN THE FAMILY project?*

CHUCK: DEATH IN THE FAMILY, and it's all related to the next movie — which I don't know anything about so don't ask me. *(Laughter.)* But all these things came into play, and I'm thinking, "My God, I'm going to have everybody in the world examining this with a microscope." But they *liked* it if they did, so everything went very well, it was a very pleasant experience. And the thing about Batman and Robin, there's a reason why they've been around 50 years.

RENE: *What's that?*

CHUCK: I don't know what it is. *(Laughter.)* But they're *classic*, they're classic characters. There's something about them that readers have responded to. Batman is not all hype either, you can't keep a character going 50 years on hype. There's something appealing about him and Robin, and that made the job that much easier. It's just classic material.

RENE: *For those that may not know, could you set up the premise for the series for us?*

CHUCK: The premise is that Tim Drake, in about 18 months running storyline, Tim Drake has discovered Batman is Bruce Wayne and because of that, obviously, he's got some kind of handle on Batman, and he wants to be the next Robin. He auditions for the job over and over again and *finally* Batman offers him the costume, and that's where our mini-series begins. Tim Drake says he's not ready for the job, doesn't have whatever it is. "I'm a fair detective, I'm a decent athlete, but I *can't* let you down. I'd rather walk away than let you down." So what Batman suggests is he go out in the world and find whatever it takes to become Robin. And after that it's a series of calamities with Tim Drake. He goes to learn under a martial arts master but that never really works out, and then he's drawn into this globe-trotting adventure, and in the course of this adventure he learns what he has to learn from many masters, including the villain. He's exposed to a lot of things that he's never been exposed to, and by the end of it he's ready to take on the mantle of Robin.

RENE: *How would you describe his character? What kind of teenager is he?*

CHUCK: He's not real secure in social situations. Basically he's a real *doof*

around 50 years. I don't know what it is. *(Laughter.)*"

around girls, which I wanted to make clear because all the Robins before have been so —

RENE: *Debonair?*

CHUCK: Yeah, well. *(Laughter.)* These teenage Romeos. We were *never* Romeos, nobody's a Romeo when he's a teenager. And Tim is very good with computers but he's also an athlete, which to me is a dichotomy in a character, he's a jock and a nerd all at the same time and the two things war within him. He's not very intuitive about people. Batman by being Batman is very distrustful and suspicious, and Robin is not naive but he just doesn't know how to read people. By the end of the series he gets a little more adept at that.

RENE: *How else does he change by the end of the series?*

CHUCK: Well, he's tougher by the end. He's also presented with a lot of choices, choices that if he decides this way he can't be Robin, if he decides that way he can be. Deadly force is one of the choices he has to make. He's left in a situation where it really is, you know, a very difficult decision for him to make. And he's also presented, once again, with the death of someone close to him. So, a lot of changes by the end of the series. He's more comfortable with Robin, he's more comfortable in a street fight situation. It's like boxers say, it's not how hard you can hit, it's how hard you can get hit. By the end of the series he can get hit really hard and still come back.

RENE: *Let's see, you worked with Tom Lyle and Bob Smith on this?*

CHUCK: Yes.

RENE: *What did you think of the art team and the total package?*

CHUCK: I felt it was really beautiful. I'd worked with Tom before on STRIKE and SKYWOLF at Eclipse, so we were really comfortable working with each other. And I thought **Bob Smith** just . . . he did something with Tom's art, he opened it up. It was a good marriage between the two. They had worked together before, but I felt this was by far the *best* thing they'd ever done together. It was a great collaboration. I was real pleased with it.

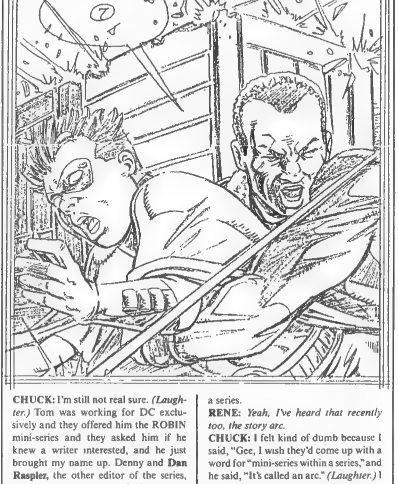
RENE: *Was this the first time you'd worked at DC?*

CHUCK: Very first time. I hit a home run the first time at bat at DC.

RENE: *That's a really nice project to work on.*

CHUCK: Yeah, yeah. You usually break in on some title facing cancellation or something.

RENE: *How did you get the job?*



CHUCK: I'm still not real sure. *(Laughter.)* Tom was working for DC exclusively and they offered him the ROBIN mini-series and they asked him if he knew a writer interested, and he just brought my name up. Denny and **Dan Raspler,** the other editor of the series, apparently had been thinking about approaching me anyway about doing some work for them, so one day I didn't have it and the next day I did. It really was a "slap me, I'm dreaming" situation.

RENE: *Things happen real fast in this business.*

CHUCK: Yeah, it's feast or famine.

RENE: *Do you foresee doing more work for DC?*

CHUCK: They've offered me a BRONZE TIGER mini-series. Bronze Tiger is a character from SUICIDE SQUAD, a martial arts expert, and I don't know much about him. They've offered it and I've submitted a really *sketchy* plotline, I have to hear back.

RENE: *Would Denny be editing that?*

CHUCK: No, **Dan Raspler** would be editing that. Denny has *talked* to me about doing a three-issue BATMAN arc. Arc's a word I just learned the other day, I would have called it a mini-series within a series.

RENE: *Yeah, I've heard that recently too, the story arc.*

CHUCK: I felt kind of dumb because I said, "Gee, I wish they'd come up with a word for "mini-series within a series," and he said, "It's called an arc." *(Laughter.)* I didn't get that newsletter, I don't know, but it's a good word — it's a *short* one anyway. *(Laughter.)* And then there is talk of another ROBIN mini-series next year, maybe they'll keep the whole team together.

RENE: *That would be nice to see. So, your plans are to keep on writing as much as you are now or more?*

CHUCK: Less. *(Laughter.)* I can't keep up this schedule. Also, people keep talking about me as the most prolific guy in comics, which means it's like they're saying, "How does he hack it out so quick?" I don't want to get that kind of rep, so I'm going to —

RENE: *Do less and be more appreciated.*

CHUCK: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* I'll probably still have the same high profile because I do jump from company to company and do short-term projects, but at least I'll know I'm writing less. I might take a vacation for the first time in five years.

"I've never been real thrilled with the Robins."

TOM LYLE

Recently I had the pleasure of being a guest at the Augusta-Con 4 at the Book Exchange in Southgate Plaza. Tom Lyle (artist of the very hot ROBIN mini-series) and I have known each other for about nine years and we had a great time at the convention, where this COMICS INTERVIEW confab took place. Meet the fun side of Tom Lyle . . .

ROGER BROWN: *How did you end up with the ROBIN assignment?*

TOM LYLE: I was doing a book called STARMAN and, at that time, I had worked out a deal with DC to do another book, so I set #25 to be my last issue of STARMAN. As I looked ahead I thought there might be a big gap in my schedule, so I called up the BATMAN editor, **Denny O'Neill,** who had expressed interest in using me on something in the future. Editors do have a policy of not raiding talent from other editors within their own company, so people would have frowned if he had asked for me while I was still working on STARMAN. I asked Denny if he had a fill-in issue of BATMAN that I could do. He asked if I would be interested in working on a mini-series. When I learned that the mini-series was ROBIN I said, "Wow, twist my arm and I'll do it." Robin is part of the Batman mythos, although I've never been real thrilled with the Robins in the book. Dick Grayson, the original Robin, I couldn't have given a flip about when I was a kid; it was like, "Get out of the way, kid, I want to see Batman." The second Robin, Jason Todd, I don't know enough about him because I wasn't a regular reader at the time. From what I did read, I didn't think he was a very likeable character . . .

ROGER: *You voted to have him killed?*

TOM: *(Laughter.)* I did not vote to have him killed! What was really neat about getting the ROBIN assignment was that I was able to return a favor to **Chuck**

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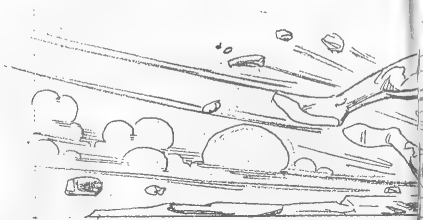
"ROBIN #1 sold 600,000, three times what they expected."



Top: Oblong pencil panel from Lyle's last STARMAN job from DC Comics. Tom considers the work on this issue to be far superior to his earlier work on this title. Below: Another oblong panel, this one from the ROBIN mini-series, written by Chuck Dixon.

Dixon, who offered me the SKYWOLF assignment when I was first getting started. Basically, they wanted a writer for the series who had some sort of background in martial arts — or at least knew about martial arts. They wanted ROBIN to have a very heavy martial arts edge to it. I suggested that **Chuck Dixon** might be available and all of a sudden both of us had a new job and that was kind of neat. As a penciller I can't do too many jobs, I can usually only do one book a month. As a writer, **Chuck Dixon** writes about four or five books a month.

ROGER: *Are you happy with the way the series has worked out so far?*

TOM: As a matter of fact, yes, I'm real thrilled with the overall project. I think it is the best work that Chuck has done and the best work that I have done as far as pencilling. **Bob Smith,** who inked over me on the early issues of STARMAN, is even better now. And part of that is that my art is better also. I have also finished drawing all five issues so they will all ship on time. DC is satisfied because they were expecting really good things out of this and it has really grown into something larger than they expected.

ROGER: *How are you handling the success, the notoriety gained from the series?*

TOM: ROBIN #1 has sold, or will sell, in the neighborhood of 600,000 copies and the good average comic book would sell around 100,000 copies. DC was projecting sales of around 200,000 copies so the sales are at least three times what they were expecting, maybe more. Because of the huge sales figures **Chuck Dixon** and I are getting quite a bit of attention as writer and artist on the series. Luckily, I don't think I have the personality to want to be a prima donna star type. Basically, my wife said if I start to sound too egotistical she will kick my butt. *(Laughter.)* On a more serious note she has been one of the more objective people to look at what has been going on with me and helped me by offering advice.

ROGER: *How did DC come up with the new Robin costume?*

TOM: There was actually, at one point, going to be a costume design contest in which people would get to vote on their favorite costume. There were 12 to 15 costume designs laid out, which the one out now is one of. Before they did the costume contest they showed the designs to the director of the first BATMAN movie, **Tim Burton,** because Warner Brothers does have some say in the look of the new Robin because not only are they the parent company of DC but they also did the first BATMAN movie, which made lots of bucks. **Tim Burton** wants to use the new Robin in the new movie. Robin should be in the second movie but don't quote me on that. **Tim Burton,** after looking over the designs, said he didn't want a contest and decided on the costume he wanted. The new cos-

"I really had to fight to keep the spiked hair."

tume was designed by **Neal Adams.** The costume is exciting because while it is new it uses the old elements at the same time

ROGER: *Why is your Robin's hair different from Neal Adams' version?*

TOM: I really had to fight to keep the spiked hair, not that helmet-head look. I wanted it to be really different, he's only 13. That's just my interpretation of how it should be.

ROGER: *Most of the comments at conventions revolve around the fact that they're glad to see that Robin isn't wearing shorts anymore.*

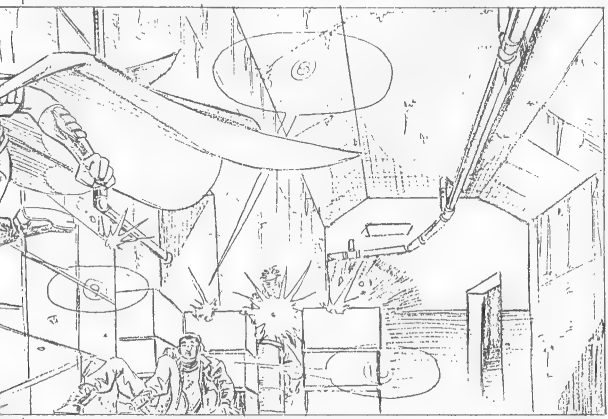
TOM: He now wears tights, and he doesn't have the pixie-type boots anymore, he has a ninja-type of boot these days. Our intention with the mini-series was to make Robin a viable, likeable character so they won't have another situation where readers will want to call in and have him killed. This Robin is also designed to be a little more intense in the sense that he will be right there, at Batman's side.

ROGER: *Is there another Robin waiting in the wings?*

TOM: No. They're thrilled this one's working out. Personally I like this Robin better than the other two and hope that he'll be around a long time.

ROGER: *So they're not going to kill him off again?*

TOM: I really don't think so. They've already announced another mini-series planned for November of this year —



"The costume is similar. Merchandising shouldn't be hurt."

I guess I can say that, **Denny O'Neill** has already been talking about it — so I think he'll be around awhile. The same creative team will do the next series as well.

ROGER: *Will merchandising force the return of the original Robin, like in the BATMAN syndicated strip?*

TOM: I doubt it. The new costume is so similar, the merchandising shouldn't be hurt by it. It's a nice extrapolation of the original. I think that was part of the reason this costume was selected over the others. You can still easily recognize him as Robin.

ROGER: *Why did they name him Tim Drake, which is a duck?*

TOM: *(Laughter.)* I don't know.

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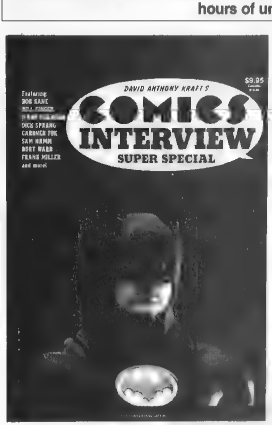

BATMAN

Spotlights on:

BATMAN THE MOVIE – motter & askwith on the movie set
PARTY OF TITANS – jack kirby, bob kane, jerry siegel
DARK KNIGHT – frank miller on his magnum opus

Interviews with:

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FRED FINGER - remembrances of a forgotten forefather
JERRY ROBINSON - telling tales of times past
GEORGE ROUSSOS - info on the early days
DICK SPRANG - vintage batman artist voices his views
GARDNER FOX - a dialog with the dean of dc writers
STEVE ENGLEHART - on controversial claims & movie treatments
BURT WARD - tells tales of tights and tv
SAM HAMM - the inside story on scripting batman:the movie
FRANK MILLER - on the subject of censorship
BOB KANE - creator of the caped crusader on batman today

PUNISHER

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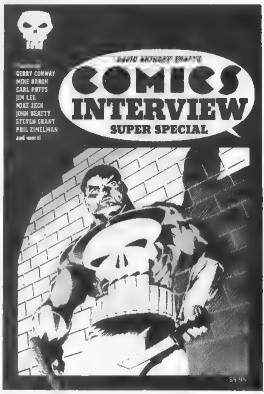
MIKE BARON - on punisher, badger, ginger fox and nexus
CARL POTTS - on the viable vigilante
JIM LEE - a lee's eye view of punisher
STEVEN GRANT - from whisper to psychoblast to punisher
MIKE ZECK - on captain america, spidey & punisher
JOHN BEATTY - from acolyte to accredited artisan
PHIL ZIMELMAN - the man who's paid to give zeck the brush off
BOAZ YAKIN - full story of the punisher screenplay



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"Around '66 I discovered Marvel Comics."

Marv Wolfman and **Alan Grant** came up with it.

ROGER: *How did you first get involved in comics?*

TOM: I've always wanted to do comics ever since I was a kid. When I was college age, my parents encouraged me to go into advertising so I majored in Advertising Design at the University of Florida. I did advertising art for ten years which I found extremely boring.

ROGER: *You designed Campbell soup can labels?*

TOM: No, nothing that interesting. *(Laughter.)* I designed logos for temporary job shots, that sort of thing. Somewhere along the line during my advertising career I started sending out resumes and I ended up as art director for a print shop in Augusta.

ROGER: *Who were some of the early influences on your work?*

TOM: I read a lot of the DC stuff, BATMAN, SUPERMAN, because they were handed down to me. I was the youngest of three boys in the family.

ROGER: *These comics were well read?*

TOM: These comics weren't in mint condition when they were handed down to me and certainly not so when I was through with them; they *were* well read. Collecting was a pretty new thing and not really around then. I'm talking about the mid-Sixties. Some of the DC artists like **Carmine Infantino** and **Gil Kane** were influences. Around 1966 I discovered the wonderful world of Marvel Comics. Back then quite a few artists had a lasting impact on the comics industry and me in particular; **Jack Kirby,** who created characters like Fantastic Four and Captain America, **Steve Ditko,** who helped create Spider-Man. His style was wildly different from **Kirby** and I felt like a kid in a toy shop. Towards the early '70s, when I first started to do comic art seriously, I discovered **Barry Smith,** who

The Comet, as illustrated by Tom.

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Interviews with:

CHRIS CLAREMONT - from x-men to excalibur
ART ADAMS - from longshot to new mutants and gumby
STAN LEE - and company on x-men on tv
WALT & LOUISE SIMONSON - on x-factor
JOHN ROMITA JR. - expatiations on x-men
TERRY AUSTIN - x-men inker extraordinaire
TOM ORZECHOWSKI - x-men's ace alphabeteer
ARNOLD DRAKE - ex-scribe of x-men
DAVE COCKRUM - x-men x-tra
BILL SIENKIEWICZ - from new mutants to elektra
ANN NOCENTI - the invisible editor materializes
BOB HARRAS - mutant master and s.h.i.e.l.d. scripter
JOHN BUSCEMA - from silver surfer to wolverine
JOHN BYRNE - a candid conversation
LOUISE SIMONSON - ex-editor of ex-men

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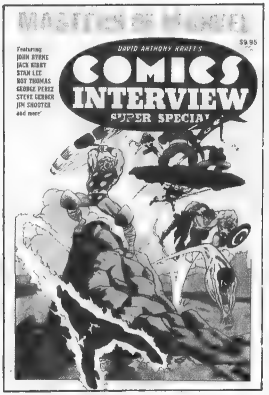

MASTERS OF MARVEL

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JOHN BYRNE - back at marvel with a vengeance
JACK KIRBY - "the king" talks on his comics career
STAN LEE - marvel's "stan the man" remembers
ROY THOMAS - tales of the marvel bullpen
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"I knew I could draw, even when one particular editor

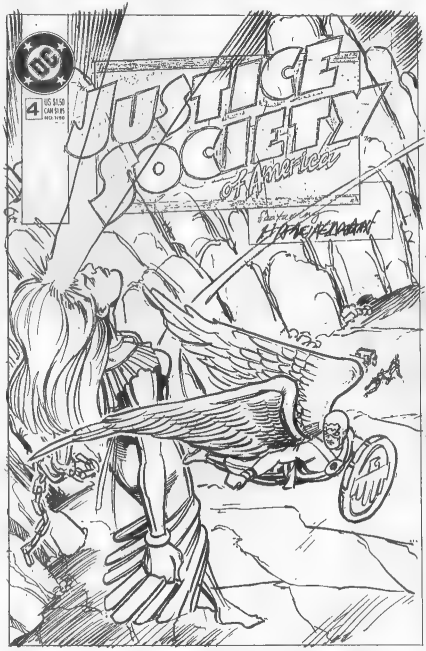
was drawing CONAN THE BARBARIAN. When I was trying to develop a style I tried to draw exactly like him.

ROGER: *How difficult is laying out the panel design?*

TOM: Panel layout is where I look at myself as a director and I like to think about it as setting up the shots, varying the angles and shots, close ups, long shots — that's part of the fun. To me it's sort of hard, sort of not hard. It's enjoyably hard.

ROGER: *How did you go about breaking into the comics industry?*

TOM: I knew I had to be closer to New York City — since both Marvel and DC are located in New York — so my wife and I moved to Baltimore, MD. It isn't that close but it is an easy three-hour train ride to NYC and it is cheaper than living in NYC. The intent was that I would go into the city regularly and show my stuff. I was showing my stuff for a year and a half and of all things I ended up working for a company in California called Eclipse Comics. I ran into **Chuck Dixon** back in 1986 at a comic book convention in Philadelphia and at the tme he was writing a book called AIRBOY, which was the revival of a character from the '40s. They were doing a back-up series using a former Airboy character called SKY WOLVES and they needed an artist. **Chuck Dixon** offered me that back-up strip based on what he saw at the convention. I was already doing some work in comics for some smaller companies but that was the event that triggered my career. I've been working



Three phases of a Tom Lyle cover creation, all in their breakdown stages . . .

told me I should quit. I stuck to my guns and kept with it."

regularly since then, since July of 1986. Getting into the industry was a matter of doing samples, showing them to people at conventions and going to New York to show my work. I knew I could draw even when one particular editor told me I should quit drawing. Basically, I stuck to my own personal guns and kept with it. Persistence in this industry does pay off because there are so many people that want to be in comics.

ROGER: *What advice would you give for someone wanting to get into comics today?*

TOM: That's a tough question because there are various ways to get in. Some of the editors at big comics companies may hate me for this but I will say that the people that are really serious and want to break into the industry should pick a particular editor at the company that you are interested in and gear your submissions towards him. If, say, you like GREEN LANTERN at DC, the editor is Andy Helfer. I would either do your writing or your art samples based on that character and send it directly to that editor rather than the submissions editor. Go to conventions, show your art around. Before you send your work to an editor you should show your art or writing to another artist or writer and get an opinion, because you have to be objective about your work.

ROGER: *You have to be critical of your work?*

TOM: Right now DC is saying that my art is really great, I'm improving all the time — but I know that there are

. . . The one in the center was the one picked, which was an "adjusted" version of the third breakdown.

"The Jaguar, The Shield, The Fly — I will be doing the

weaknesses in my art. I know what they are and I hope that each issue my work constantly gets better. Luckily, so far, I have been able to say that each issue of a book that I have done *does* get better. The fifth issue of ROBIN is drawn much better than the first issue; the 25th issue of STARMAN is drawn better than the first issue.

ROGER: *You become more comfortable with a character the longer you are on a title?*

TOM: That and the fact that I am becoming a much better artist. Robin for example, by the end of the fifth issue I was saying, "Yeah, I love this costume, let me draw more." The costume is really a fun one to draw and Robin is a fun character to draw. Persistence of sending material, showing material, and taking advice of others is important. You need to really draw or write a lot, you can't take one sample and show it over the course of a year.

ROGER: *One has to learn to deal with the rejection when first starting out.*

TOM: You have to be willing to face it because there is going to be quite a bit, you're going to hear quite a few no's before the doors start to open. Once you're in the door, unless you're dumb and screw yourself up by not being reliable and meeting the deadline, you can stay in the industry. I've built a reputation by being reliable. And by trying to improve. The editors know that

revival of The Comet. This will be a new line for DC."

I am striving to do better and better. It's important to remember that comics are a business.

ROGER: *You mentioned that you have finished up the artwork for the ROBIN mini-series. What future projects do you have planned?*

TOM: I will be working on a superhero from the '40s and '50s named The Comet. I will be doing the revival of The Comet. The Comet will be the first book that I will be plotting and doing rough dialogue. I will be pencilling and inking the book. I worked up a bible for the revival of this character which gives the origin, the person's personality, plot line, location, that sort of thing. I've plotted into the second year of the series. I've also designed all of the characters, along with five or six major villains.

ROGER: *You mentioned the possibility of a crossover between your book and some others.*

TOM: Crossovers will only be with characters within this line of comics, The Jaguar, Shield, The Fly. The crossovers will be major events when they happen, we don't want them to be gratuitous crossovers. The books will launch in late May or early June and we will try to release a book every week or every two weeks. Since this will be a new line of books for DC they will be promoting the line and will want to have the books out in time for the major conventions this summer.

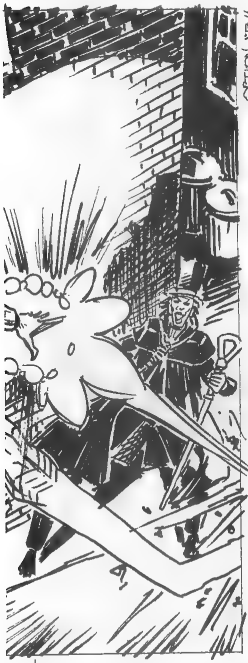
As with the previous two pages . . . a three-version evolution of a DC cover, here for the second issue of THE COMET.

COVER ROUGHS – COMET #2

THIS ONE WAS USED

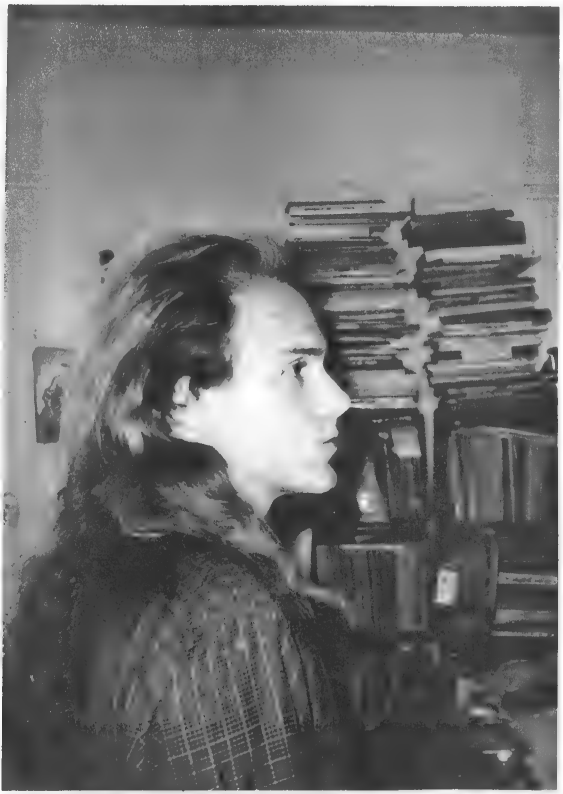
EITH BRIAN MICHAEL MAY I LIKE OPTION A, BUT THIS ECCH SHOULD HAVE AN ACTION CHARACTER SO 'C' MAY WORK BEST.

OPTION "B"



OPTION "C"

"For comics to progress as an art form, we have to



all art with this interview copyright © 1991 Chester Brown

forget superheroes altogether. It's a dead-end genre."

Chester Brown

This past year Chester Brown was voted Best Cartoonist by his North American peers — the highest possible accolade in the comic-book industry from the prestigious Harvey Awards.

His comic book YUMMY FUR was once an inventive exercise in automatic writing that resulted in entertainingly bizarre stories about Martians, pygmies, vampires, exeretion, and other stuff relating to the phallic. More recently, however, the book has been an honest and almost profound autobiography in sequential art. And, as it was in the beginning, the title still features a back-up starring . . . Jesus Christ.

Chester's juxtaposition of the ED THE HAPPY CLOWN stories and the adaptation of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark have led some to describe the comic as something along the lines of a creative coup, a marriage of the sacred and the profane. And he's not quite done yet . . .

This recipient of numerous nominations, several industry and fan awards, various compliment-gushing, hop, catch-phrase-containing critical reviews is a native of Quebec, now living in Toronto.

Recently he returned to Montreal, and after a good day's work of panel participation, signings, and other convention stuff — the day after he had visited his old neighborhood in the town of Chateauguay (just outside the city) to take some reference photographs for upcoming chapters of his comic — we sat down and had a chat.

His story — in a nutshell: the disillusioned fanboy turned artistic champion for the comic-book medium — is found in this interview conducted at the Second Annual Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention.

This is an informal conversation with a reticent and soft-spoken artist, who by no means has reservations about sharing his ideas and philosophies about the "state of the art," religion and recognition. You'll notice that there was quite a bit of laughter from each of us but that doesn't really make light of the topics at hand. I just wish you could hear Chester's distinct laugh . . .

Special thanks to Claude Lalumiere.

JAY TORRES: *In the author's preface for the ED THE HAPPY CLOWN trade paperback you state: "In late 1979 I was 19 and had made several unsuccessful attempts to break into the comic-book business." One of these attempts entailed a trip to the Marvel and DC offices in New York?*

CHESTER BROWN: Yeah, that's specifically what I referred to . . . those trips were most of what I was thinking of . . . although . . . yeah, that's what I would have been thinking of when I wrote that. *(Laughter.)*

JAY: *Then there was a time when you aspired to work for Marvel and DC?*

VITAL STATISTICS

- My full name is Chester William David Brown.
- I write and draw a comic called YUMMY FUR which is published by Vortex.
- I was born in Montreal, Quebec, in 1960
- I grew up in Chateauguay, a suburb of Montreal).
- I "studied" commercial art at Dawson College (in Montreal) for a little over a year ('77-'78) and then dropped out.
- I've lived in Toronto since 1979.
- I began self publishing YUMMY FUR in 1983 as a mini comic.
- YF became a full size comic at the end of 1986
- ED THE HAPPY CLOWN, a book which reprints material from YUMMY FUR, was published in 1989

"I didn't know much about submission procedures, and

CHESTER: Oh, yeah, definitely. I would have been overjoyed to work for either of those two companies at the time.

JAY: *So you attempted their styles of comic-book illustration at one point or another?*

CHESTER: I tried to work in a more-or-less realistic vein. Kind of the way they approach their stuff. Although it never did look the way things are supposed to look according to a book like HOW TO DRAW COMICS THE MARVEL WAY.

JAY: *Your art didn't fit the big two mold?*

CHESTER: No, not really. I remember what **Ross Andru** had said, that it seemed too much like underground stuff.

JAY: *What was your first publicly displayed work? Did you contribute to fanzines?*

CHESTER: I prefer that people think of it as the first mini-comic issue of YUMMY FUR, but there was fanzine work before that.

JAY: *What kind of fanzine was it?*

CHESTER: The people contributing to the fanzines I was part of in the late seventies in Montreal would have been more influenced by HEAVY METAL and the undergrounds. Not superheroes at all.

JAY: *So after you had been rejected by Marvel and DC, what did you do next?*

CHESTER: I got the addresses of a whole bunch of underground publishers and what there was as far as alternative publishers at that time. At that point, I didn't know much about submissions procedures and sent off originals. I'd mail off the 10x15 originals. I didn't know you weren't supposed to do that.

JAY: *Did you lose any of them?*

CHESTER: No, I was lucky, they'd always mail them back.

JAY: *Eventually, you decided to self-publish your work, and chose the mini-comics format — why mini-comics?*

CHESTER: Cost was a big factor. It seemed the cheapest way to self publish and I really liked the format. It just really appealed to me, it was simple, and so easy to do, and just perfect for the self-publisher.

JAY: *When did Vortex pick up YUMMY FUR?*

CHESTER: **Bill Marks**, editor at Vortex, called me in early '86 and then he kind of dawdled about this and that, and took his time getting the contracts ready. But finally the first issue came out in December '86.

JAY: *Do you know why Bill decided to pick up your work?*

CHESTER: He liked it. He had written

sent originals. I was lucky, they always mailed them back."

"I never set boundaries for myself . . . Anything I

to me pretty early on, after I had begun publishing the mini-comics, just to tell me he thought my work was great. And I had tried to get into the Vortex anthology comic they were publishing then. **Ken Steacy** was editing the book at that point and didn't think the particular story I submitted was appropriate for Vortex — or the anthology, rather — even though he liked my work.

JAY: *Eventually Vortex gave you your own book. Did you have any trouble getting full creative control?*

CHESTER: Um, you know, I asked for absolute creative control and they gave it to me. There really was no problem.

JAY: *In issue #7, one of your characters, Professor Markham, presents this problem to his colleagues: "We have here a momentous occasion but also a big problem — how to present a story which has mountains of feces, people crawling through anuses, and a talking penis . . ." There's something wonderfully allegorical about that. How did you decide to handle all of those things mentioned?*

CHESTER: Well, I never set boundaries for myself . . . anything I wanted to do, I did. I never imposed any self-censorship.

JAY: *Initially, how did you react to people who thought YUMMY FUR was too gross, or upsetting, perverse?*

CHESTER: It didn't surprise me. I knew there were people who were going to be offended and I knew there were going to be people who liked it. Or at least I hoped there would be people who would like it. If there weren't people writing in complaining, that would've surprised me.

JAY: *I know you get the occasional "disgusted reader" letter, do you get a lot of letters from censorship groups, and "decent literature" factions, and some such nonsense?*

CHESTER: We haven't gotten any letters from that type of group . . . um . . . there has been some trouble with certain printers who have rejected the book.

JAY: *Really?*

CHESTER: Oh, yeah. There have been at least two printers who printed one issue of YUMMY FUR and then didn't want to touch subsequent issues.

JAY: *Did they cite reasons why?*

CHESTER: Because they found it offensive or else they were afraid clients of theirs, if they learned that they were printing this book, would make a stink or something. And I think we've gone to other printers, too, where we submitted the book and they wouldn't touch it. I'm not sure how many but, you know, you just keep going to printer after printer until you find one that does print it.

JAY: *Yeah, such a hassle shouldn't affect someone who's been called "respected," "acclaimed," and "brilliant." How does it make you feel when you hear things like "a landmark in Canadian comics publishing" said or written about YUMMY FUR? Are you good at accepting compliments?*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* Well, I like it.

JAY: *Does this put any sort of pressure on you to produce material? I mean when someone calls the book "a work of isolated genius . . ."*

CHESTER: In a way, you do feel you have something to live up to. Perhaps, it does make me want to do better work. Like, I don't feel I can get away with doing stories that don't measure up to my own standards. I know that YUMMY FUR is a book people pay attention to and, if I know that I'm not working up to my full potential, probably other people will notice, too.

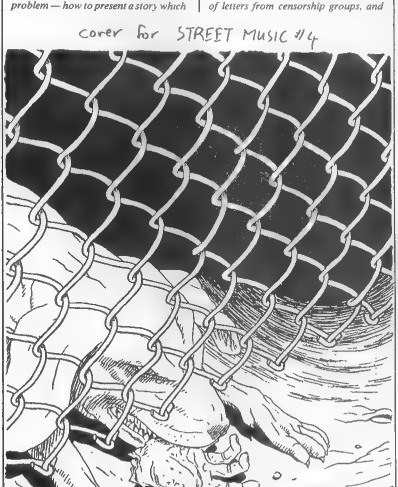
JAY: *How many Harvey Award nominations have you received?*

CHESTER: Let's see. I've been nominated three years . . . first year I got one for "best new book," or something like that, um, the next year I got four, and this year five.

JAY: *And you won for "best cartoonist" and "best graphic novel" for ED THE HAPPY CLOWN. Congratulations! Now, tell me, what do the Harveys mean to you — what importance do you place on them?*

CHESTER: I was certainly very excited about winning them. Perhaps people might get the impression that they are more important to me than they really are, because of the way I con-

cover for STREET MUSIC #4



wanted to do, I did. I never imposed self-censorship."

centrate in the letters column about them. *(Laughter.)*

JAY: *Well, I always took that as fun. Not some desperate artist begging: "Vote for me, please! Vote for me! After three years of nominations I have to finally get an award!"*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* Good, but they are important to me. I do recognize, though, that they're not . . . well, I don't know . . . the fact that **Terry LaBan** — who does UNSUPERVISED EXISTENCE for Fantagraphics — didn't get "best new talent" this year and **Jim Lee** did . . . it's not like these things really do reflect what's best.

JAY: *But these are your "peers" voting, the same people who voted for you could very well have voted for Jim Lee . . .*

CHESTER: I'd like to believe that everyone who enjoys my work has great taste but I know that's not true — you're probably right — some of the people who voted for me probably voted for Jim, too. Seeing him win does taint the awards for me. Perhaps it's good that he won — it reminds me that the awards are, at heart, meaningless.

JAY: *Hope this doesn't offend you but: do you have any ill feelings towards those first publishers for not hiring you?*

CHESTER: Not at all, Jay, this is the kind of question you should be asking. I thank them for not hiring me. I harbor bitter feelings towards them for churning out awful comics. Perhaps I should thank them for that, too, though. My comics can't help but look good when compared with the shit they produce.

JAY: *What if Marvel or DC had hired you? Where would you be now?*

CHESTER: I'd either be a low-level hack or I'd have become so disgusted with the industry that I'd have to quit comics.

JAY: *Let's talk about story telling. Where do most of your ideas come from, what inspires you to write what you write?*

CHESTER: Well, now that I'm doing autobiographical stories, I get them from my life. *(Laughter.)*

JAY: *So what fueled your imagination for the Ed stories?* (Laughter.)

CHESTER: Um . . . kind of my unconscious and . . . it was kind of like automatic writing . . .

JAY: *Yeah, the Ed stories have terrific spontaneity and such raw cleverness that seems to be a result of some form of free writing. How much do you actually script or plot out?*

CHESTER: For Ed I scripted maybe a scene at a time . . . when I finished that scene I'd script the next scene. But not even that, a lot of the time. Often it was just panel by panel writing. It kind of varied. Never did I script out a whole issue. Sometimes I would have a whole issue worked out, vaguely, in my head. And sometimes I wouldn't have a clue what was going to be in an issue.

JAY: *Your stories have a sense of unstructured and unplanned creative flow, yet at the same time characters and situations tie in and seem to come full circle in an almost meticulously contrived way. Did you have an idea which of your characters from earlier strips would pop up again later on, which ones you'd recycle?*

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CHESTER: No. *(Pause.)* Well, it depends on which characters. Let's see . . . the percentage would be 20% of the stories were planned out and 80% made up as I went along.

JAY: *So when the UFO dropped the rat-eating pygmies from the sky, you didn't know that they'd later come back with a crusade to save their penis-god from a bunch of sanctimonious scientists?*

CHESTER: No. That was the first Ed story . . . and I didn't even know that I was going to use the Ed character again. I printed the story . . . that story seemed to get a lot more reaction than any of the other stories, so it seemed natural to

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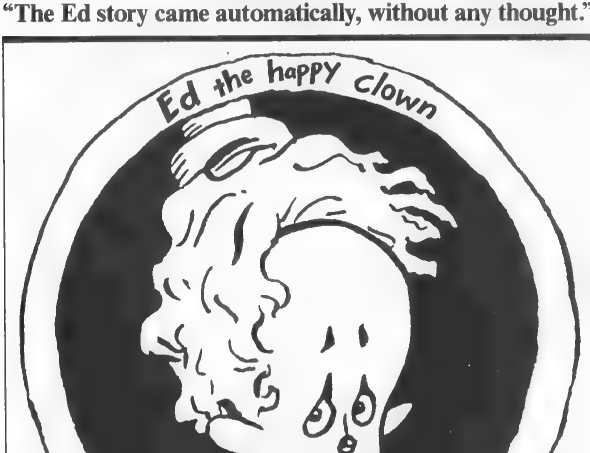
"The Ed story came automatically, without any thought."



continue doing Ed stories.

JAY: *That very first Ed story had the now-almost-classic "leg breaking" scene. God, that one sequence is probably imbedded in the minds of everyone who's ever come across it . . .*

CHESTER: Yeah, that scene got the most reaction in the whole issue

JAY: *So that was the impetus for the Ed stories — where did you get the idea from?*

CHESTER: Actually, I remember reading in one of the POPEYE books — I think it was from his first appearance, but I'm not sure — where Popeye breaks his arm, and it struck me as really funny, so I guess I got the idea from **Segar.**

JAY: *I really liked the paradox of "Ed the Happy Clown" and all the shit he's put through, nothing they teach you in clown college. How did you come up with the character?*

CHESTER: Um . . . I'm not sure. Like many things in the Ed story line it just kind of came automatically without any thought. I had to start a story and drew a clown character — that was the first panel of the story — and I just continued with that character.

JAY: *Okay, so you have this man in prison who can't stop taking a crap and the stuff he excretes turns into this Blob-like mass that spreads every which way in this one strip ("The Man Who Couldn't Stop" — issue #3). And later on we discover that the same guy's asshole is actually a portal to another dimension. (My Bum Was A Gateway Into Another Dimension" — issue #7). How did you come up with connections like these?*

CHESTER: Let's see . . . I probably came up with that idea after drawing issue #6, that happened in issue #7 so . . .

JAY: *It just popped into your head and sort of gelled together then?*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* Yeah.

JAY: *Has anyone ever pointed out to you that all the Ed stories can be read in almost any order?*

CHESTER: No, I've never read them out of order.

JAY: *Yeah, kind of works. Like serial literature or something. Here again the idea of the narrative as a cycle, and*

"The Bible certainly has had a huge impact on my

connections . . . follow this train of thought: Chet Doodley, Chet, Chester, Doodley, doodle, draw. Are you Chet?

CHESTER: The reason I named the character Chet was because, like many artists, a big fear of mine is losing my right hand. So, when he lost his hand it seemed naturai to call him "Chet" and name him after me.

JAY: *Like Chet in his boyhood, where you read that story of St. Justin losing his hand?*

CHESTER: I made that up.

JAY: *No! I naturally assumed . . .*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* A lot of people seem to think he was a real saint. There may have been a St. Justin, but I don't think he had his hand chopped off. If there is such a saint, then it's just coincidence.

JAY: *That almost ruins my whole set-up for the next few questions . . . Anyway, I think I wanted to know if you come from a religious family.*

CHESTER: My parents were quite religious. We had to go to church every Sunday — Sunday school, and all that kind of stuff.

JAY: *Let me guess, you had your own children's illustrated Bible?*

CHESTER: Yeah, we had a whole bunch of them. My mom bought stacks of them. She'd read us one children's Bible and put it aside and pick up another one and read us that. Over a couple of nights or days, whatever, she'd read us from one children's version, then would buy another and start reading to us from that one . . .

JAY: *Did you pick any sort of differences in the various versions?*

CHESTER: Oh, no, they were pretty much the same stories. There were differences in style, and we understood that.

JAY: *I guess what I'm leading to is this question: Where did you get the inspiration to interpret the Gospels the way you have?*

CHESTER: Um . .

JAY: *It all came with the Vortex issues, right? There were no Gospel adaptations in the mini-comics . . .*

CHESTER: Yeah. I was very much interested in the Gospels at the time. What I really wanted to do was a book just of the Gospel adaptations. I didn't want to do the front stuff, the Ed stuff . . . Well, I kind of wanted to do it, but I was really more interested in doing the Gospel adaptations. I didn't think that a book with just Gospel adaptations would sell, and Bill didn't think so, either. So really, to us, the commercial part of the book was the Ed stuff. Now, it's not that I minded doing the Ed stuff, it was fun. But, when we began doing the YUMMY FUR Vortex issues, my interest was more with the Gospel of Mark. I was certainly glad that I hadn't locked myself into doing just a book of Bible adaptations, because my interest in the different parts of the book, front and back, goes up and down. At certain points I'm more interested in the Gospel stuff, at certain points I'm more interested in the front of the book. At this point I'm at a stage where I'm more into doing the front of the book. But, the Gospel stuff could "take over" again. I still love doing the Gospel stuff.

JAY: *So you enjoyed working on the Gospels more than you actually did the Ed stories?*

CHESTER: *(Pauses.)* No, no. I actually probably enjoyed working on the Ed stories more, but I wanted to do the Gospel stuff more

JAY: *Mark was pretty straightforward, and less interpretive, traditional as far as the medium would allow, I guess. And Matthew is turning out much looser, in dialogue, characterizations. Was this planned or more a result of your automatic writing?*

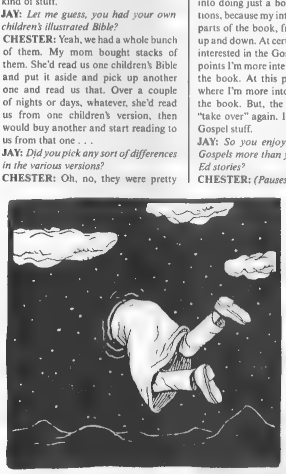
CHESTER: Oh, no, I knew that Matthew would be a bit freer all along. Really when I first had the idea I was going to do Mark in as free a manner as I'm now doing Matthew. I decided that that probably wouldn't be the best way to go because it would be too repetitive. Better to make Mark more straightforward, geared towards a more traditional adaptation, and then start to branch away from that in subsequent adaptations.

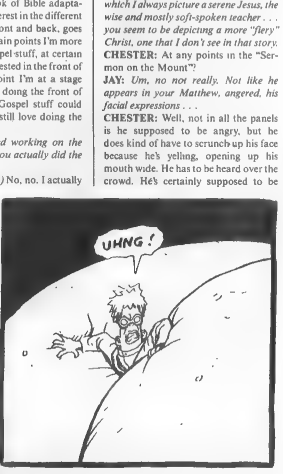
JAY: *I see how you've done that with your portrayal of Jesus. He seems more "angry" now in Matthew. It was a fresh approach for me particularly in the telling of the "Sermon on the Mount" in which I always picture a serene Jesus, the wise and mostly soft-spoken teacher . . . you seem to be depicting a more "fiery" Christ, one that I don't see in that story.*

CHESTER: At any points in the "Sermon on the Mount"?

JAY: *Um, no not really. Not like he appears in your Matthew, angered, his facial expressions . . .*

CHESTER: Well, not in all the panels is he supposed to be angry, but he does kind of have to scrunch up his face because he's yelling, opening up his mouth wide. He has to be heard over the crowd. He's certainly supposed to be





life. It forms the basis of the faith I was raised in."

angry in some panels.

JAY: *I guess I misinterpreted some of that. And usually I remember the "Sermon on the Mount" being presented, say in film, as a very calm scene, pastoral in every sense, with Jesus rather placidly saying when you pray use these words: "Our Father Who Art in Heaven . . ."*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* Yeah.

JAY: *Maybe also your use of more blacks in drawing Jesus, his hair's darker, and visually you equate that to —*

CHESTER: I wanted a balding Jesus. And it's easier to tell he's balding if the hair is black. That's all.

JAY: *Why a balding Jesus?*

CHESTER: For a different look from the traditional one

JAY: *Matthew 7:20-29 the "Calming of the Storm." Jesus tames the waves and stifles the winds and the disciples, in awe and disbelief, turn to each other and ask: "Who is this man?" How would you answer that?*

CHESTER: If I was with the disciples in the boat, right then, I would have been asking the same question. *(Laughter.)* Now, two thousand years later, I'd say he was an ordinary man like the disciples themselves . . . yeah, well, that's probably as much as I can say.

JAY: *Just an ordinary man, with no "special traits"?*

CHESTER: Oh, I'm sure he had special traits and abilities like we all do . . . it's . . . so long ago . . .

JAY: *So you believe that, historically, Christ existed. But do you believe he was as wise and eloquent as the Gospels have him, or would you credit any of his greatness and incredible deeds to the devices of the writers of the Gospels, whoever they may have really been?*

CHESTER: I have no doubt we produce people who are capable of being very wise, as wise as Jesus was supposed to have been, as charismatic, as energetic. Whether Jesus really was the way he was portrayed in the Gospels, who knows? Well, I'm sure he wasn't exactly as he was portrayed in the Gospels, because I just don't believe someone can make a man rise from the dead. But as for, you know, intellectual attributes, or whatever else, that one gets from the Gospels about Jesus . . . I don't know. I can't know what kind of man Jesus was. He must have been impressive in some way to inspire such devotion in his followers. How? I don't know.

JAY: *Obviously, in some way, he, or writings about him, have affected you. I found some very interesting things I'd like to share with you, some funny parallels between some of your writing and precepts found in Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount": For example when one reads "If your right hand offends you, cut it off," you can't help recall Chet Doodley's story; Jesus says: "If someone wants to borrow money don't refuse them" and that somehow calls to mind your experience with Helder; and then there's the entire passage dealing with "judging the speck in your brother's eye" and the run-in with Mr. Pug in "The Playboy Stories"* . . .

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* Well, as far as Helder and Mr. Pug went, in both cases, those things were true. Mr. Pug did have a splinter in his eye, Helder did ask to borrow money

JAY: *And you gave it to him?*

CHESTER: *(Pauses.)* That's right. *(Laughter.)* But believe me there have been plenty of times when people have asked to borrow money and I didn't give it.

JAY: *Mr. Pug and the "Sermon on the Mount" appeared in the same issue, right?*

CHESTER: Yeah, I noticed that and thought it was . . .

JAY: *Uncanny.*

CHESTER: Nice timing, whatever, nice coincidence.

JAY: *Would it be too crazy to suggest that the Bible makes a "perfect companion" to YUMMY FUR?*

CHESTER: Well, the Bible certainly has had a huge impact on my life. It forms the basis of the faith I was raised in. Probably it's so ingrained in me that it does form a natural, I don't know . . . companion based on my life *(Laughter.)*

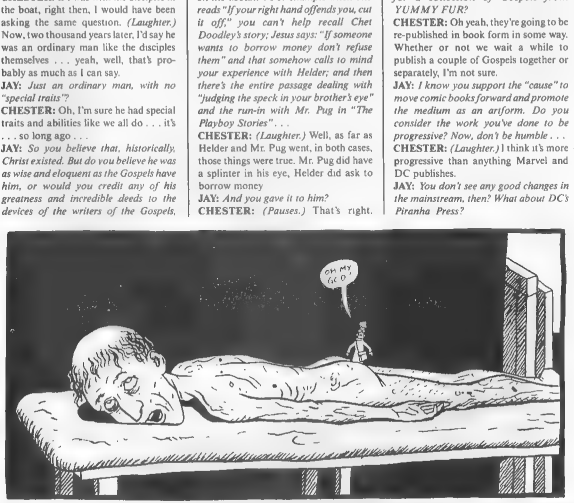
JAY: *And you plan to do John and Luke? I anxiously await your treatment of the Lukan parables . . . Any plans for a collection of Gospels from YUMMY FUR?*

CHESTER: Oh yeah, they're going to be re-published in book form in some way. Whether or not we wait a while to publish a couple of Gospels together or separately, I'm not sure.

JAY: *I know you support the "cause" to move comic books forward and promote the medium as an artform. Do you consider the work you've done to be progressive? Now, don't be humble . . .*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* I think it's more progressive than anything Marvel and DC publishes.

JAY: *You don't see any good changes in the mainstream, then? What about DC's Piranha Press?*



"The best creators have too much self-respect to sign

A STORY BEGUN IN '80-'81 NEVER FINISHED

the Piranha contract. It's just more of the same."

CHESTER: Piranha's only a half-step in the right direction. They're not offering creators full ownership of their work. The best creators have too much self respect to sign the Piranha contract. This leaves **Mark Nevelow** (editor of the imprint) with second- and third-rate talents to pick through. Actually, looking at the books they put out, it looks more like fifth- or sixth-rate talents. Anyway, as for **Morrison, Gaiman** and whoever — the big two always have a couple of talented writers who do work that's above average. In the '70s it was **Gerber, Englehart** and **McGregor,** the '80s **Miller** and **Moore.** They did the adolescent male power fantasies better than the other writers at the time. Is **Grant Morrison** better than **Steve Englehart** was 15 years ago? Is **Neal Gaiman** better than **Alan Moore** was five years ago? I don't think it's a matter of progression — it's just more of the same.

JAY: *True or false, the comic cannot progress as an artform unless there occurs a renaissance or evolution in the mainstream or superhero genre?*

CHESTER: For comics to progress as an artform we have to forget superheroes altogether. It's a dead-end genre. We have to start drawing comics that will appeal to adults and the only adults who enjoy superhero comics are adults with stunted intellects and adolescent tastes.

JAY: *You think the mainstream is creatively stagnant, with no redeeming qualities? No positive changes?*

CHESTER: No.

JAY: *Your suggestions, then, to people who want to work in comics?*

CHESTER: To an artist I'd say . . . write your own work and work with your own characters. That's it.

JAY: *Write your own ticket, maintain full creative control and decentralize the publishing power that exists in comic books? Like you do?*

CHESTER: Basically.

JAY: *Wrapping this up, here's a trite but lovely question: When it's all said and done, what would you have liked to accomplish with your work?*

CHESTER: Hmm. Well, I'd like to see my work alongside other works of literature like, I don't know, **James Joyce** and **Tolstoy,** and all that kind of stuff.

JAY: *Really???*

CHESTER: *(Laughter.)* That's what I'd want, not necessarily what's going to happen!

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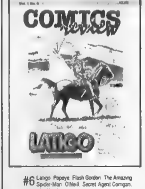

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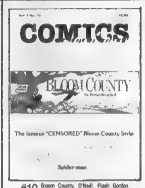

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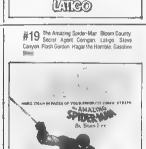

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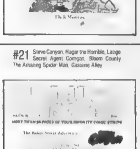

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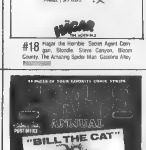

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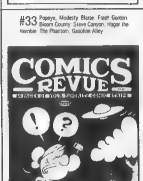

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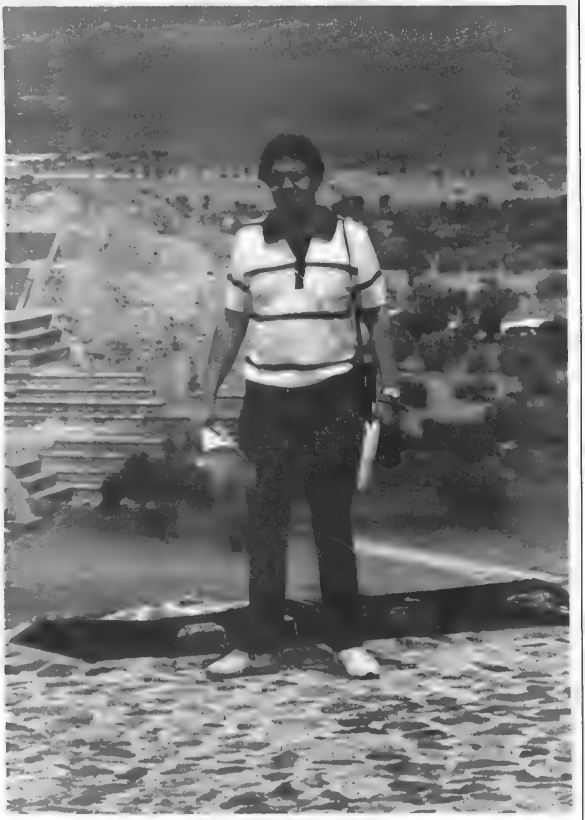

I've edited up to nine weekly comics at a time."

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The largest of these pyramids, north of Mexico City, is the Pyramid of the Sun, 216 feet high, with a base covering 750 square feet. Most Mexican pyramids are built on top of one another, and the Indians, to mark their 52-year cycles, would build a new pyramid over the old one, it is believed. Pyramids in Mexico differ from Egypt in one main aspect — in Mexico they are temples, not tombs.

Pyramids are possibly the soundest man-made structure on the planet. Built wide at the base and tapering to their pinnacle, they have withstood the ravages of time, earthquakes and the ages.

It would not be inappropriate to compare the career of Rémy Bastien van der Meer to a pyramid, and not just because his father was an archaeologist. His knowledge is broad-based and sound, for throughout his life Rémy has gleaned knowledge from a wide spectrum of authors and focused this knowledge on his career in the comics medium. In part one, Rémy explained the Mexican comics field, and here in part two, he gives us an inside view on his personal career . . .

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *How long have you been working in comics?*

RÉMY BASTIEN: I have been working in comics since 1974. I started in comic books at a company called Editorial Posada. **Posada** is the name of a very famous engraver from the times of the Mexican Revolution. He created the Mexican skeleton, the laughing death's-head that is such a popular figure in Mexican folklore. Well, he didn't exactly *create* it, but he gave it its present design. Now, this publisher, Posada, started out with books, newsstand paperbacks, and also with a magazine called DUDA, which means DOUBT. This magazine published comics dealing more-or-less with what the French authors **Pauwels** and **Bergier** created. They wrote a book called THE DAWN OF THE MAGICIANS and created the school of fantastic realism which has its more modern exponents in people like **Erich Von Daniken.** So, DUDA dealt with voodoo and UFOs and transmigration and **Edgar Cayce,** all of the "supernatural" aspects of human culture. It was *enormously* successful in the beginning.

Posada also published LOS AGACHADOS, in English THE DOWNTRODDEN, by **Rius,** who is a ground breaking creator-writer-artist in comic books. LOS AGACHADOS is perhaps

Rémy, atop the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, and below, Pantheon Books' CAPITALISM FOR BEGINNERS. On the lower right, a cartoon/autograph by Mexican creator/writer/artist Rius.

RÉMY BASTIEN

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RÉMY BASTIEN

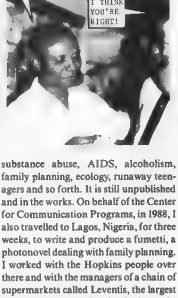
"I traveled to Nigeria to write a fumetti."

the most successful social communication comic book ever written in the Western world. It reached bi-weekly sales of 500,000 copies per issue dealing with themes like Marxism, the system of election for senators, stamp collecting, vegetarianism. **Rius** is an author with a leftist ideology, a mild leftist ideology, but he created LOS AGACHADOS with enormous success. His characters were set in a rural town in Mexico and they would go into the cantina and start talking, country shop-talk. Then they would get into politics, and from there the author would explain what Marxism is and how it works and so forth, and what it proposes to society.

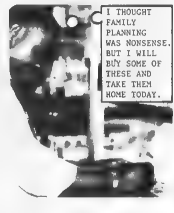
Rius has been imitated worldwide, there is even an American company that came out with a book called CAPITALISM FOR BEGINNERS as an answer to **Rius's** CUBA FOR BEGINNERS and MAO TSE TUNG FOR BEGINNERS and MARXISM FOR BEGINNERS. So, I was also editing that. And **Rius** was a total creator in the sense that he did his research, he wrote the script, he did the artwork, and his wife would do the coloring. He is one of the few totally creative comic-book people in Mexican publishing. Most Mexican comic books are created by teams, an editor and a writer and a penciller and a letterer and an inker — pretty much your assembly-line method of production. So, I started off at Posada as a scriptwriter writing for DUDA, and also as an editor. That was in 1974. Comics, paperbacks, children's magazines, the works.

From then I've worked in other areas. I've worked in TV and radio, in advertising, and I did a lot of academic translations. I left Posada in 1975, I was there for about a year and a half. And then I got back into comic books at Novedades as a freelance writer. I wrote cowboy books, terror books, police books — we're talking digest size, 112- to 190-page comic books with one or two panels per page. Then I got into editing the Marvel line. I created JEWELS OF LITERATURE and MEN AND HEROES. I've edited up to nine weekly comics at a time.

I've also done some work in the social communication field using comics. For the Center of Communication Programs of the Johns Hopkins University, I have developed an "enter-educate" character, a reporter called Martín Plata. He's a modern character, set in Latin America, whose action adventures allow for soft sell messages dealing with problems like



substance abuse, AIDS, alcoholism, family planning, ecology, runaway teenagers and so forth. It is still unpublished and in the works. On behalf of the Center for Communication Programs, in 1988, I also travelled to Lagos, Nigeria, for three weeks, to write and produce a fumetti, a photonovel dealing with family planning. I worked with the Hopkins people over there and with the managers of a chain of supermarkets called Leventis, the largest chain of retail stores in Nigeria. Leventis, in cooperation with the government, were about to launch contraceptive and family planning articles in a nationwide campaign, and they wanted a giveaway publication to create awareness both in their employees and the public of the benefits of family planning. The trip to Africa, some wonderful people I met over there, both American consultants and Nigerian health workers, and the work itself were very interesting — but let me tell you, the deadline was a nightmare to meet. I wrote about eight versions of the script, did the storyboards, orchestrated the "actors," took the photos, did the layouts, the typography and the paste-up of the mechanicals, designed the whole thing and delivered it ready for printing about four hours before I had to catch the plane for the return trip via London.



Two panels from the Nigerian fumetti dealing with family planning awareness.

Comics are a great medium for enter-educate projects and, once again, thanks to the Hopkins University, I was a speaker at The Enter-Educate Conference held in L.A. in March, 1989, where a fantastic group of social communicators from everywhere in the world gathered to exchange ideas. Through that Conference I met **Larry Krames**, a doctor and publisher located in San Francisco, who through his company, Krames Communications, has been using comic books, among other editorial resources, for health-oriented booklets for many years, producing *truly* remarkable books that, unfortunately, as I see it, are not really known in the mainstream of American comicdom. Artists such as **Jack Davis** have illustrated some of his titles.

DAK: *In your commercial writing, do you use the full-script method?*

RÉMY: Yes. In Mexico basically you use the full-script method, in which you type capital letters for the indications for the artist; you describe the kind of panel you want, the focus, the character, what's going on in the background. And then you use upper- and lower-case for the dialogue and the text. It's a full-script method in which you're giving the camera angle and the camera movement and the positioning of the characters — so it's almost like the artist is in a work-for-hire situation in which he's interpreting the script. It's not like where the writer will give the artist a synopsis and then the artist will pencil it and *then* the writer will fill in the text and the dialogue.

JULIA R. MATHER: *Have you tried that method at all?*

RÉMY: No, that method is rarely used. What we have done is that occasionally you will get an artist who is sufficiently versatile to do his own lettering and his own composition of the panels. Basically, the system in Mexico is this: the writer does a full script, then the script goes to the letterer who will work on the blank artboard, he will write in the text and the balloons. This is constraining because the artist will have to draw around them. Occasionally, the artist will cut out the balloons and invert them, put the left one on the right and the right one on the left, because it's more agreeable to the way he sees the panel.

I don't agree very much with this

"The model whose face we liked refused to pose naked."

1981. Left to right: Bastien, Spanish comics master Antonio Hernández Palacios and Mexican artist Hugo Rangel.

system, but it's a hard habit to break. The Mexican comics industry is a high-pressure industry since comic books are weekly. And, of course, no artist can draw 92 one- and two-panel pages a week. Some of them do it in two or three weeks. Some of them work with a penciller and/or inker for the backgrounds, but basically the average comic-book artist will take a month to do a standard Mexican issue. Perhaps with new products in the future we will be able to experiment with American style, the Marvel style —

DAK: *Or, as the people at DC say, the "so-called Marvel style."* (Laughter.)

RÉMY: Yes, where the penciller will be responsible for most of the final look of the comic book, in many cases.

Actually, I have worked on one occasion with the "so-called Marvel style." This was in 1981. Back then, the Mexican government, through the Ministry of Education, got heavily into comic books, covering a wide spectrum of genres and formats: everything from fumetti dealing with agriculture and do-it-yourself electronic manuals to historical comics and comic-book adaptations of famous Mexican novels. The Ministry of Education also sponsored a great comics convention, with a nationwide contest for original comic presentations. The jury was composed of famous international talent, such as **Sergio Aragonés, Víctor de la Fuente** (whose work has been featured in HEAVY METAL and the now-defunct EPIC), the writer/artist team of **Muñoz** and **Sampayo, Breccia** (from Argentina) and other creators from Europe, mostly, including the unique **Antonio Hernández Palacios**, illustrator of the famous MAC COY western series (originally published in France) who is, for me, one of the greatest comic-book creators of all time.

Anyway, with a friend, **Hugo Rangel,** a very versatile illustrator and advertising talent, I created a 17-page story called THE EYES OF THE JAGUAR and, basically, we used the "Marvel style." I wrote a synopsis, we both sketched the story from that, we used models and took black-and-white and Polaroid photos of the angles and expressions the story required, and Hugo used the photos for the final drawing. For the main character we used a karate teacher. For the feminine character we had to use two women. The one whose face we liked for the story refused to pose naked, or in a bathing suit, even with her boyfriend present, so we just took pictures of her face, and then we hired a professional model from the Academy of Art to pose naked for the scenes requiring a woman undressed. Hugo combined the photos of the two women to create the feminine character. After the whole story was sketched, then I wrote the captions and dialogue.

It was a different approach to a comic and we won second prize, against all predictions by other editors in the private enterprise comic-book sector, who said the contest would be rigged by the government people to favor their comic-book creators. But I always had confidence in the jury. It was composed of strictly international talent that was not going to indulge in any prize-awarding hanky panky. We missed the first spot by one vote.

But, anyway, with your normal weekly schedules in standard Mexican commercial comic-book production, it's not really practical to use the "Marvel style" on an everyday basis. Another factor is that, for this style you need pencillers, for instance, who are also narrators, story tellers, while most Mexican illustrators are really interpreters of scripts, full scripts.

DAK: *Has the approach to the stories changed in the years you've been in*

"THE EYES OF THE JAGUAR won second

THE EYES OF THE JAGUAR used the face of one model . . .

comics? For instance, if you were writing a Western, a cowboy story, in the mid '70s, would that story be very much like what you're writing today? Has the direction of the comics changed?

RÉMY: It's pretty much the same. What *has* changed, but is now coming back to its original level, is the tone of sex and violence in mainstream comic books. In 1982, when the economic crisis started, it was noticeable, all you had to do was go to a newspaper stand and you would see an increase in the amount of violence, bondage, sexism — on the covers — because due to the crisis sales started plummeting. Sales were going from a million to 700,000 and so forth, and the editors didn't know what to do. So everybody scrambled for the obvious, which is more sex and more violence, because basically the comics are geared towards adults. But this in itself also tired out the public.

During this kind of phase in which violence and sex in comics increased *tremendously*, there were a few examples of family comic books which were selling excellently. It showed that the public was not totally alienated. Now, the comics industry in Mexico started out as basically family entertainment. Comic books in the '40s and '50s and '60s were very dignified publications which any parent could take home without worrying about what his children were going to see. At one point, around the end of the '60s, a new direction started showing up in which comics were more "adult oriented" — for me adult comics are not sex and violence but context, like a philosophical work that only adults could understand. But anyway, towards the end of the '70s and the '80s this *rage* started in Mexico, which has now toned down. Also, the Comics Commission, which depends on the Ministry of the Interior, had to clamp down because newspaper stands were becoming X-rated spots in the city streets.

DAK: *That Comics Commission — is that a censorship board?*

RÉMY: It's called the Qualifying Commission for Publications and Illustrated Magazines, and it used to depend on the Ministry of Education but it now depends on the Ministry of the Interior, which is a more rigorous branch of the government. It is not a censorship branch of the government in the sense that it will say you can publish this or you cannot publish that — there is freedom of the press in Mexico and liberty to publish whatever you will. But the commission *will* suggest to an editor to either put his product in a plastic bag or to put a splash on the cover mentioning "For Adults Only." Is that a disclaimer?

DAK: *Well, a rating.*

RÉMY: A rating, to rate their magazines on the cover or put them in plastic bags. So it is a controlling commission to a certain degree. It does have a function

. . . and the body of another.

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prize, against all pre… …er editors."

NO RENACERÁ DE SUS CENIZAS ESTE IMPERIO. EN ESTERAS PRESTADAS LAS MUJERES PERDERÁN LA PUREZA DE NUESTRA SANGRE. LOS HOMBRES HUIRÁN Y LUCHARÁN, PERO ¿QUÉ HARÉ YO, EL GRAN SACERDOTE, SI ABANDONO LA MORADA DE MI DIOS?...

Fabulous ethnic scene from the historical fantasy, THE EYES OF THE JAGUAR. Script by Bastien, art by Rangel.

that covers newspapers, and it also keeps its eye on the way politics are handled and so forth. But Mexico really has a free press situation and anything can be published, with certain rules, certain observations. And there are hefty fines for breaches in agreements.

DAK: *Well, I've noticed here in Mexico City, which I have been told is the largest city in the world —*

RÉMY: It is.

DAK: *— I don't see the level of men's magazines like PENTHOUSE and PLAYBOY, X-rated theaters, things you would associate with a city of this size. Because it's a very Catholic country, is there a high degree of censorship pressure?*

RÉMY: Mexico City is the biggest city in the world, with 20 million people in the metropolitan area and more coming in every day. You do have your Mexican edition of PLAYBOY, a magazine that publishes "the best of PENTHOUSE," and you have your own made-in-Mexico girlie magazines, but *definitely* they are not on the level of what you see on the corner in a big U.S. city. There are X-rated theaters, but they're not as obvious as in some foreign countries. They don't open at noon.

DAK: *No HUSTLER magazine?*

RÉMY: Definitely not! The level of the pornography, if you will, is much lower. To a certain degree Mexico *is* a very highly-Catholic country, maybe 99 percent of the population is Catholic, and it's a *conservative* country in many ways — and there *is* some pressure from the

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"Mexico has not decided what it thinks of pornography."

Martin Plata, reporter. Character sketches of the enter-educate hero by Peruvian artist Jorje Bernuy.

religious sector, from the conservative sector of society, the "right," if you will.

Mexico is also a country that perhaps has not really decided *what* it thinks of pornography. In more developed countries, like Scandinavian countries, pornography has reached a state in which it has saturated the people and people don't really care about it — it's in the background, it's not *important* anymore. People are cured, they are vaccinated against it, it produces no tremendous effect. In third-world countries, in developing countries, pornography is seen differently. And I think not only in Mexico but in many other countries the governments and the influential sectors of societies still don't know what to think or what to do about it.

Though there is no concrete evidence that pornography is directly linked to sexual violence, in many developing countries there is the belief that it *does* lead to more crime, sex-related crimes and so forth. So I really wouldn't know exactly what's happening in Mexico, but it's much more toned-down than other countries.

DAK: *The reason I ask is because you mentioned that some of the more sexual comics omit the indicia, which seemed to indicate that it was either illegal or they feared repercussions of some kind.*

RÉMY: Well, you see, before you edit a comic in Mexico you have to go through quite a bit of red tape. It's not *impossible* red tape, but first you have to register. You have to go to the Department of Author's Rights and investigate if your logo or your title is not already on the market, or if somebody else has not registered a similar title. Once they clear your title then you register it. Then you have to go to the Ministry of the Interior, to this qualifying commission of periodical publications, and obtain a certification of title and of contents. Then you have to go to the Postmaster's office to get the second-class postage permit. Once you've complied with all these steps *then* you can launch a magazine.

So, many editors out to make a quick buck — and perhaps the easiest way to make a quick buck is to produce semi-pornographic comic books or magazines or fumettis — create the product and strike some kind of under-the-water deal with the distribution system and sell it. Perhaps what these people are avoiding are all the legal steps, the red tape. They would probably have trouble getting their permits if their product is considered unsavory or vulgar. Yet even these semi-pornographic comic books or fumettis are still very far from what you see in other countries — but, for Mexico, they are considered heavy.

DAK: *What do you see as the direction comics in Mexico are going to take in the '90s? Will they evolve, become more sophisticated? Is there a chance that a fandom will develop here?*

RÉMY: In general, comic books will continue to go as they are. They have gotten much more reasonable in the amount of violence and unsavory situations which they handle. They are slowly coming back to the spirit of the best times for comic books in Mexico. The industry will probably maintain its volume. And as far as new formats and higher-priced editions, I think that's going to be difficult because we're still going through an economic crisis. But I do expect that the '90s will see a surge in options, in characters, in creativity, because competition is getting harder.

There's a lot of copying going on here. If somebody puts out a successful cowboy comic book when there wasn't one on the market, in one or two years there will be up to 14 titles dealing with the cowboy genre. Then half of them will disappear and in another two years there will only be four left, and finally two will maintain their public.

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"Most comic-book readers are working class."

But companies such as EJEA have cut out their own area of the market. They've rescued the wrestling character, who was a traditional character in Mexico — the Mexican equivalent of the superhero — and they've created their own titles, like the bricklayers title, the truckers title, the football (soccer) title, the boxing title. They have been very creative in this aspect, and they've kind of created their own market segment.

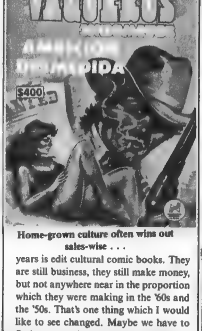
I think that to a certain degree creativity in comics can be gauged by the amount and the quality of the characters, as opposed to genre comics. And Mexico is lacking in character comics right now. If you look on the newsstand you will see mostly genre comics, which are easier to do from a certain standpoint.

DAK: *But they don't have the advantage a character has, which is that if people* love *the character they will want to come back to it again and again.*

RÉMY: And many characters in Mexico have branched out into movies. Not as successfully as BATMAN or SUPERMAN or POPEYE, but many, many characters have jumped from Mexican comics to movies and to radio soap operas. So there are the same developmental possibilities for Mexican comic-book characters.

One significant difference in comic books in Mexico is that there is a long-standing tradition of cultural comics. Since comics have been basically oriented to the adolescent and the adult public, Mexicans from way back to the '40s when the industry really started have been accustomed to reading about cultural themes in comic books, be it the exploration of the North Pole, or a biography of **Einstein** or of **Beethoven** or historical figures in Mexican history, or great discoveries and inventions. Back in the '50s and early '60s I would say that 30 or 35 percent of the comic books being published in Mexico were *cultural*, and they were covering everything from the lives of saints, which were *very* successful, to things like biographies of artists, sportsmen and other celebrities.

As the public has changed, and perhaps the more literate of the comic-book readers have gone from comics to books, encyclopedias and so forth, the up-and-coming public, which seems to be more working class than ever, is not buying as many cultural comic books as before. For me it's kind of sad, because what I've mostly been doing these past



Home-grown culture often wins out sales-wise . . .

years is edit cultural comic books. They are still business, they still make money, but not anywhere near in the proportion which they were making in the '60s and the '50s. That's one thing which I would like to see changed. Maybe we have to find a new angle to get the cultural comic books to the public. If they're well done, if they're *entertaining*, the public will buy them because they are in a certain way predisposed to reading about culture and great personalities and historical events in comic-book form.

DAK: *I'll give you the crass commercial way to do this —*

RÉMY: Have a superhero go back in time?

DAK: *Not that crass!* (Laughter.) *If the category titles, the genre titles, are selling, like a war book, you can always do the War of 1812 — actually do it as if you were doing a biography, but* sell *it under the guise of a war book. Just come up with some excuse to put the commercial thing on the cover and maybe* trick *them into reading history.* (Laughter.) *That's what ROLLING STONE magazine does; they put Mick Jagger on the cover and then have something about the Sandinistas on the inside.*

RÉMY: Right, maybe that's where we have to head.

DAK: *Earlier, you were talking about the editors facing declining sales — a lot of people reading this interview will be experiencing in the United States many of the same things, maybe on a smaller unit scale — this goes on everywhere, it's publishing. When sales are falling what do you do — cancel some books, put some buxom ladies on the covers? You've faced many of these things yourself.*

RÉMY: This is a multifaceted problem, because undoubtedly one of the reasons for the decline of sales of any given title is the decrease in purchasing power on the part of the consumer. Since most of the comic-book readers are working class, it's very simple to understand the amount of income they dedicate to entertainment has decreased substantially. So, if your average comic-book reader was buying eight comic books a week, he is now buying six or four or two, he's being selective. So there's the economic aspect.

Now, also, many of the Mexican publishers have made mistakes in relation to print runs and to distribution. When the crisis started in '82 *many* of the components in publishing were dollar-related, so if the dollar jumped from 25

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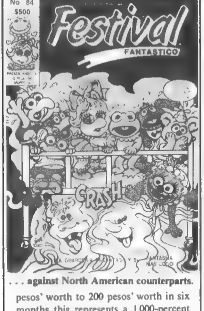
"We need a new angle to get cultural comics to the public."



. . . against North American counterparts.

pesos' worth to 200 pesos' worth in six months this represents a 1,000-percent increase, a 1,000-percent impact on inks, spare parts for printing machines, imports, photographic equipment, materials and so forth. So the publisher *had* to increase the price. When the publisher increased the price — and this is something that *all* the publishers in Mexico would do — they would drastically cut the print run to avoid the resulting increase in returns. They would do this over the board. If they had ten titles, they would cut the print run the *same* percentage on all ten titles — instead of analyzing each magazine according to its *own* particular development and sales performance. This affected a lot of comic books which were not necessarily going to have high returns.

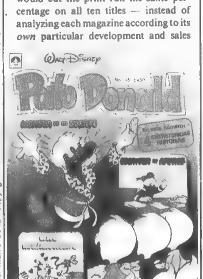
Suddenly, when the publishers looked around, in some way they themselves had contributed to decreases of sales of 200,000 or 300,000 or 400,000. Now, what we editors had to do was try to make the scripts better, try to get the artists to work better, try to do better covers, and also work on the promotion, and try to make the product as editorially competitive as possible. So we were doing our part. But on the other part, the distribution people were scared, were wary of high returns, and they were automatically cutting the print runs. This undoubtedly affected the sales of many comic books.

It's also important to note that Mexico had never had an economic crisis like the one we experienced from 1982 to the present. In 1982, the dollar was worth 25 pesos. Today, eight years later, it's worth 2,800. That's a many-thousand-percent increase. In a certain way we have now learned to live with the crisis. An editor from Brazil who was visiting at the beginning of our crisis said exactly that, "You Mexican editors and publishers have to learn how to live with the crisis." In Brazil, inflation got so out of hand that at one point comic books, newspapers and magazines were being put on sale without a printed cover price, and the point-of-purchase salesman would receive a mimeographed sheet with the prices which he could change every day. So the Brazilians have been through this already and they've kind of learned to live with the crisis. And I remember this editor, **Luis Bonfa**, was saying a 30,000 print run in Brazil was good business, while in Mexico it was a losing proposition.

So, now we've learned to live with the crisis and we're much more cautious when we cut print runs or when we increase cover prices. There was one moment — in 1985, I think — when we had a cover price increase which was badly calculated and we had to increase again one month later. That was very bad for business because the readers felt something was wrong. Your magazine goes up in cover price twice in two months and your sales drop significantly.

And there has been a change in what the public seems to be buying. The public seems to be buying more entertainment, more *simple* entertainment. This doesn't mean less quality entertainment in comic books, just simpler things; they want more escapist literature, they want more *fun!* They don't want very serious things I would say that right now the best-sellers are the more entertainment-oriented comic books, the ones that make you laugh, that really help you forget your everyday troubles. Cultural comic books are something we have to work on, to make the cultural comic books more simple and entertaining.

NEXT ISSUE: In the third and final part of this south-of-the-border sojourn, Rémy reveals how his involvement with Marvel has shaped his career and the part Marvel has played in Mexican comics, as well as why the Rawhide Kid died a terrible sales death down south . . .



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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

THE KENNEDY ANTI-ART BILL OR THE LAWYER EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1980

Davebeast,

I don't have good documentation or the time to do the research on it, so I'll have to work from memory. Someone (like **Henry Vogel**) should definitely do some kind of editorial about this.

Basically, **Ted Kennedy's** latest legislation, an "Artists' Rights" Bill, restricts the conditions under which art can be sold, virtually prohibiting ownership of art. From now on anyone buying art must conform to certain vague standards of display and resale. Art may not be resold without informing the original artist and getting his approval and paying some kind of royalty. If "Public Art" is commissioned the artist has a say in how and where it can be displayed, and removing it or choosing *not* to display it can lead to dire consequences. In effect, all art must come with a contract that follows through eternity from owner to owner.

There has already been a prosecution under the law: An artist painted a portrait of his girlfriend and *gave* it to her. Later they had an acrimonious break-up and the girlfriend cut *her* painting into pieces and mailed it to her ex. He sued and won!!!

Gallery owners are pissed since big investors are balking at buying new art because they don't want the legal hassle. There's all kinds of ramifications. Experts say that the law (signed by **Bush** with *no* media scrutiny — so much for the guardians of the First Amendment) is impossible to interpret or enforce because it is so vague and attempts to quantify the unquantifiable — *art*. This leaves all enforcement or interpretation to the liberal legislature — the courts.

I believe that **Kennedy** is the First Amendment's worst enemy. Surely you know about the **Rupert Murdoch** case, in which **Kennedy** tacked a rider onto a completely-unrelated appropriations bill — specifically aimed at the **Murdoch** media "empire." It was passed in a literal "midnight session" in which the people voting on it had *no* idea whatsoever what was in the bill: That no person may own both a newspaper and a TV station in two or more major markets. This bill was aimed directly at **Rupert Murdoch**, who owned the NEW YORK POST and the BOSTOM HERALD, as well as TV stations in both cities. **Reagan** signed this under protest, I guess figuring the Supreme Court would eventually declare it unconstitutional, but it has yet to be contested. **Murdoch** just caved in when he got *no* support.

In spite of the fact that both places are amply covered by other media of all kinds, **Murdoch** was classified as a "monopolist" and forced to sell the POST and the HERALD. Both these papers had long been ardent critics of the tubby senator from Taxachusetts!

Of course, this received very little media attention, despite the fact that it was a direct attact on the First Amendment rights these bozos are so fond of gassing about.

Ed Hannigan
Westmoreland, NH

P.S. I'm reluctant to have the anti-art tirade printed, not because I'm unsure of my facts, but because I don't have the proper documentation to make sure it stands up. Ditto on the **Murdoch** case. However, you may print it provided the readers know that this piece and the two **Kirby/Lee** things that you ran in #91 were originally private correspondence and should be viewed in that light, not held up to some standard of journalistic rigor, don't you know. I think **DeCandido's** piece in #89 was pretty much on the nose; I think he was a little too tough on Stan, though.

Speaking of who created what — did **Milt Caniff** really create DICKIE DARE (caption on the illo on pages 52-53 of #90)? I would never have thought so.

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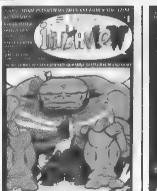

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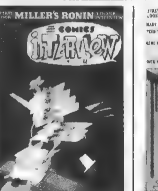

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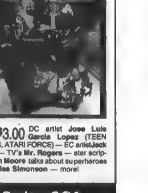

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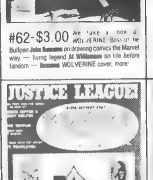

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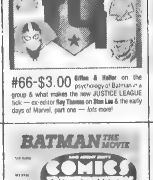

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